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SUBJECT: NEW SERBIAN ANTI-TIP COORDINATOR DISCUSSES PLANS

REF: 08 Belgrade 1186

Summary

1. (SBU) Serbia appointed a new Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, Mitar Djuraskovic, in November. Djuraskovic, a police officer with anti-trafficking experience, quickly developed a plan for 2009, which includes improving the current anti-trafficking institutional framework and planning for the next few years. Djuraskovic said challenges in the near-term included lack of funds and lack of good statistics on current anti-trafficking investigations and prosecutions. There was positive news from 2008 -- a major anti-trafficking trial concluded this year, and police arrested dozens of traffickers. Djuraskovic is enthusiastic, capable, and interested in our suggestions. We look forward to working with him.
End Summary.

New Coordinator has Anti-Trafficking Experience

2. (U) We met with Mitar Djuraskovic, who was appointed National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons on November 19, 2008, to discuss Serbia's plans for the coming year and accomplishments in 2008. The National Coordinator position was vacant for nearly a year when the previous coordinator, Border Police Chief Dusan Zlokas, retired and was not replaced. Djuraskovic, who is also the head of the Department for Combating Cross-border Crime and Criminal Intelligence Affairs in the Border Police, has been working anti-TIP issues for many years and participated on the Republic Team to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

2009 Plan Completed

3. (SBU) Djuraskovic said Interior Minister Dacic had instructed him immediately to write an action plan for 2009, noting that the Action Guide we presented to the government in November (reftel) stated Serbia needed one. Djuraskovic cautioned that it was not yet a "real action plan," because he had had little time to draft it and had not been able to consult his NGO partners. According to the draft plan, much of the work of the Minister-level Council to Combat Trafficking in Persons and working level Republic Team, which have not met for several months, would focus on planning and institutional strengthening in the first part of 2009. The Council and an Advisory Board including international organization representatives would both meet in January. Meetings of working groups on Prevention, Protection of Victims, Prosecution, and Trafficking in Children would begin in February, and the Republic Team would meet in March. He planned a two-day workshop in April to develop a more robust action plan for 2010-2012. Djuraskovic stressed that he would insist that representatives to these multi-ministry bodies be fully committed to the work and not representatives in name only.

¶4. (SBU) Although lack of time and budgetary issues would prevent complex activities in 2009, Djuraskovic said several activities were possible for the year. For example, he planned to launch an anti-trafficking website and better publicize Interior's anti-trafficking hotline. Djuraskovic also planned a round table in March to bring in experts from outside the region to discuss the links between corruption and trafficking, a subject on which there was no regional expertise. He also planned training in April for 100 police, prosecutors, and judges on the same topic. The round table and subsequent training would be expensive and require donor funds, which he hoped to assemble from UNHCR, UNODC, and IOM programs.

Challenges for Anti-Trafficking Work

¶5. (SBU) Djuraskovic said lack of funds could be an obstacle to increasing anti-trafficking activity. The financial crisis and difficulties establishing a national budget created uncertainty in how much funding would be available for anti-trafficking work in 2009. Djuraskovic said he was trying to make the point that prevention and raising awareness would be more important than ever during the economic crisis because people would be more vulnerable to exploitation. In the meantime, several projects were on hold. For example, he had an idea for a competition for 20,000 Euros worth of NGO projects aimed at reducing demand for "exploitation services," but he had no funds. Serbian government funds programmed in 2008 to produce "Modern Slavery," a thirteen-part television series on trafficking aimed at young people, had never been released, and Djuraskovic said he believed it would be difficult to get the funds in 2009.

BELGRADE 00000017 002 OF 002

¶6. (SBU) Statistics for every phase of law enforcement and prosecution were also a challenge, Djuraskovic said. He noted that, without a detailed statistical analysis, it was impossible to determine where and how the government needed to improve efforts. For example, he knew that there had been 32 charges filed against traffickers in 2008 through October, but he did not know how many traffickers were involved in each case, how many and what type of victims, or what phase of prosecution those cases were now in. Data from the Statistical Agency showed Anti-Trafficking Law convictions but not when the original arrests had been made or sentences. Interior now had a database funded by the International Center for Migration Policy Development to track and cross-reference arrests, charges, investigations, trials, appeals, and sentences, and had started entering data for new police investigations, but there was as yet no data from the Ministry of Justice. He said he hoped the Council in its first meeting would identify a mechanism for sharing information to populate the database.

Successes in 2008

¶7. (SBU) Djuraskovic noted that there had been some progress in anti-trafficking efforts in 2008, despite the challenges. For example, the "Jet Set" trial, in which the Novi Pazar deputy public prosecutor was arrested and tried, had concluded. Nine people had received sentences ranging from time served to eight years, the maximum penalty. In the first 11 months of 2008, 32 criminal charges were filed against 74 persons for trafficking in human beings, and 40 victims, mostly Serbian citizens, were identified.

Biographical Note

¶8. (U) Mitar Djuraskovic was born in 1967 and has spent most of his career in law enforcement. He graduated from the University of Belgrade Law Faculty and then worked at the Belgrade District Court as an apprentice. In 1997 Djuraskovic joined the Belgrade police. He was first an Inspector for Foreigners and was then assigned to the Border Police Directorate. In May 2002, after the National Team to Combat Trafficking was established, he was appointed associate to the then-National Coordinator and a member of the Team's advisory

Board. Djuraskovic was named Head of the Department for Combating Cross-border Crime and Criminal Intelligence Affairs in 2005, a position he still holds. He was appointed Anti-Trafficking Coordinator on November 19, 2008. Djuraskovic speaks some English. He has never been to the United States. In our previous interactions with him, he was a helpful and enthusiastic contact.

Comment

19. (SBU) Djuraskovic is experienced in anti-trafficking work, and he has cooperated well with us in the past. Our NGO contacts also praise him for being helpful and cooperative. He also appears to have Dacic's support, and he and Dacic both clearly are interested in USG suggestions. Despite the challenges ahead, Djuraskovic's ideas and enthusiasm suggest the government's anti-trafficking efforts will increase, although it may take some time for results to show. End Comment.

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